

School Library Survey early findings for Australia and New Zealand

By Jen Sheridan

Snapshot

This article outlines the early findings to the 2020 School Library Survey - Australia, New Zealand, and Asia Pacific and compares responses to the 2019 School Library Survey. The survey ran from August 28 – September 30; invitations to participate were extended to all schools in the regions via email, Twitter, LinkedIn, OZTL_Net, and promoted by a number of partners, associates, and school library groups.

The results help to advocate the role of school libraries and library professionals to education decision makers, as well as through industry associations and networks. [The full report](#) was released at the end of April 2021.

Background

In 2010 the Australian Federal Government launched an inquiry into the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools. Submissions were open to all interested organisations and individuals Australia-wide.

During the announcement of the inquiry, committee chair Ms Sharon Bird, MP, said:

Teacher librarians make a significant contribution to the school community in a number of ways, including teaching information literacy skills and providing access to information and resources to facilitate learning. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2010)

The focus points of the inquiry were:

- The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities
- The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy
- The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians
- The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and
- The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians

(House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2010)

In order to provide an informed response, Softlink launched the School Library Survey and has continued to survey Australian school libraries annually since then. The survey was extended to include New Zealand schools in 2015. While schools from the Asia Pacific region have recently been invited to participate, the response rate has not been high enough to perform informed analysis.

In Softlink's submission to the Inquiry, the following recommendations were made:

1. That an Australia-wide study be commissioned to identify and quantify the relationship between library funding, access to teacher librarians and literacy outcomes.
2. That a mechanism be established by which the funding and allocation of teacher librarian resources to school libraries is monitored and reported so as to allow consistent policies on school libraries to be developed and adopted across major education providers in Australia.
3. That school libraries that have received federal government funding be reviewed for adequate ongoing annual budgets to ensure the library is adequately resourced.

In 2020, Softlink received the highest response rate from this region to date, with 22% of Australian schools and 15% of New Zealand schools participating.

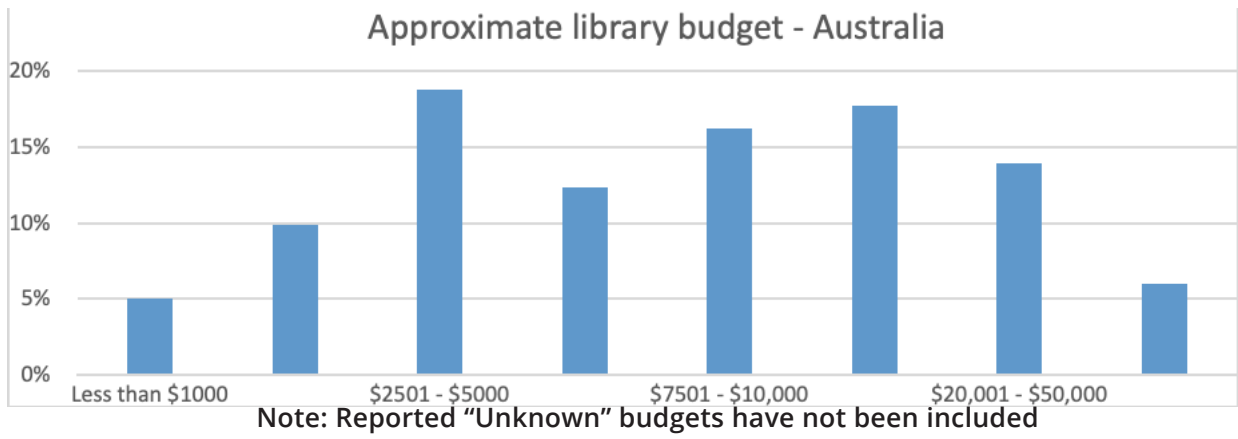
Last year, Softlink partnered with the School Library Association (SLA) in the United Kingdom to run the School Library Survey in that region, with the aim to build critical reference points for their school libraries and to highlight the specific issues and opportunities they are experiencing. Early findings for the United Kingdom can be accessed [here](#).

Early findings Australia and New Zealand

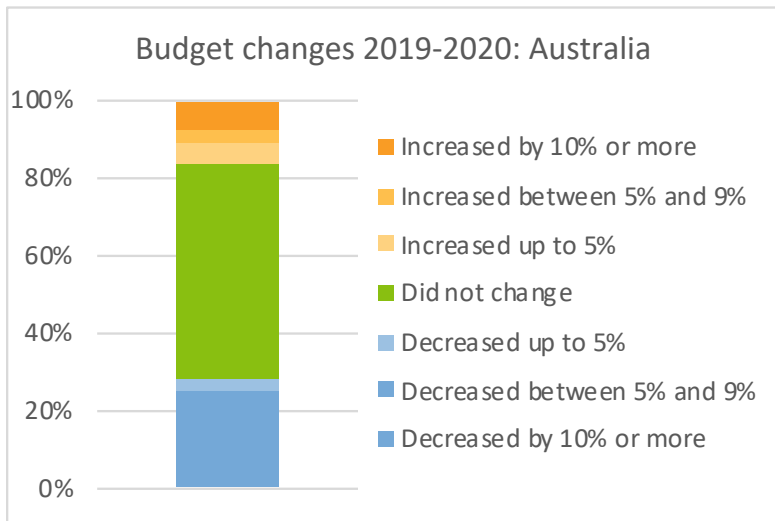
Library budgets

Participants were asked 'What was your school's approximate annual library budget for 2020 academic year - either financial or academic (excluding staff salaries)?'

When looking at reported budgets for Australian school libraries, the highest percentage of respondents reported a budget in the \$2501 - \$5000 range (19%), followed closely by the \$10,001 - \$20,000 range (18%)



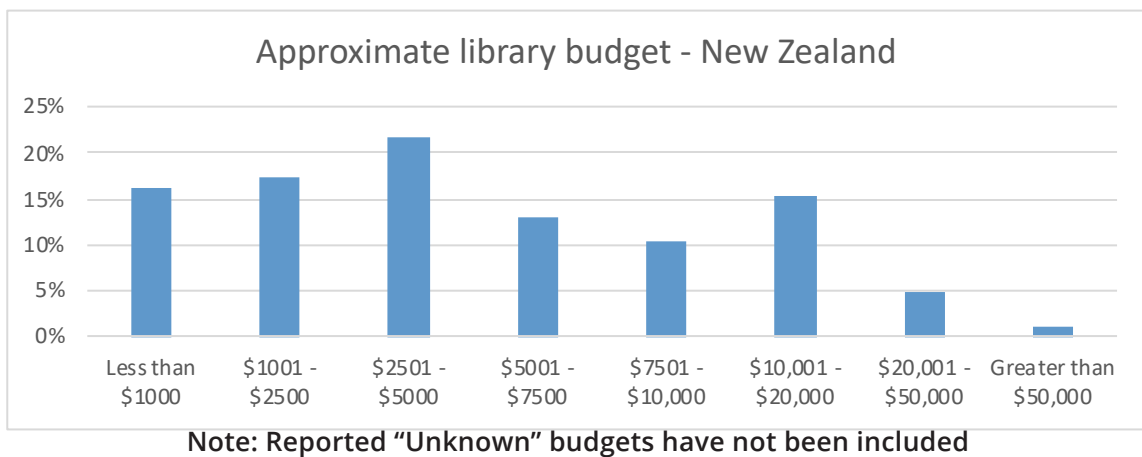
When asked whether school library budgets had changed from the previous year, 16% of Australian respondents reported an increase, 29% reported a decrease, and 55% reported no change in budget.

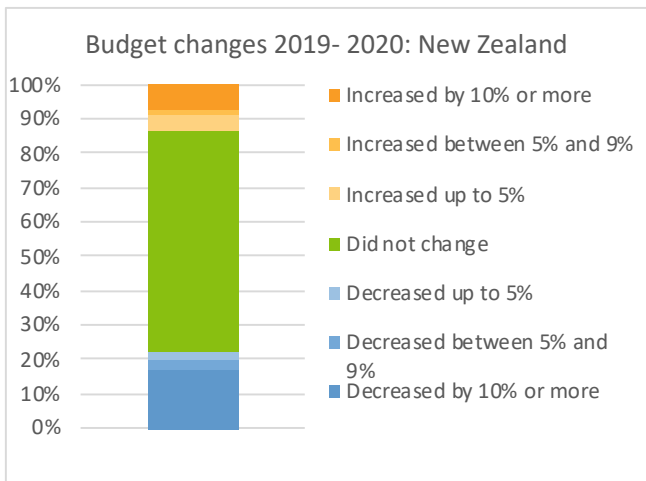


Less respondents reported a budget increase from 2019-2020 than in 2018-2019 when 19% of Australian respondents reported an increase.

Budget decreases for the same periods have improved slightly, with 25% of respondents reporting a decrease from 2018-2019.

When looking at reported budgets for New Zealand school libraries, the highest percentage of respondents (22%) reported a budget in the \$2501-\$5000 range.





When asked whether school library budgets had changed from the previous year, 13% of New Zealand respondents reported an increase, 22% reported a decrease, and 64% reported no change in budget.

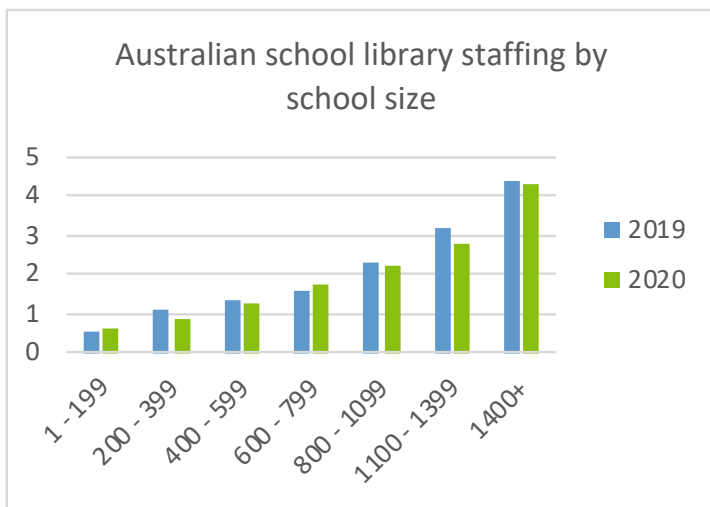
Less respondents reported a budget increase from 2019-2020 than in 2018-2019 when 18% of New Zealand respondents reported an increase.

Budget decreases for the same periods have improved slightly, with 25% of respondents reporting a decrease from 2018-2019.

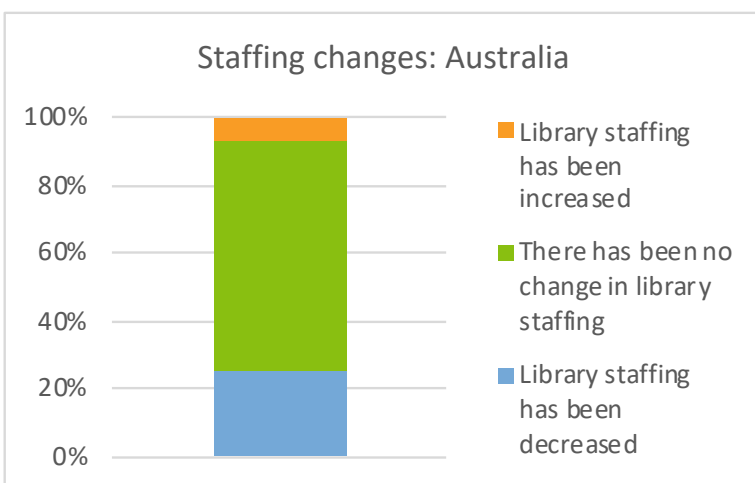
Note: Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100

School library staffing

When looking at Australia school library staffing by school size, in most cases, respondents reported fewer full time equivalent staffing numbers in 2020 than in 2019.



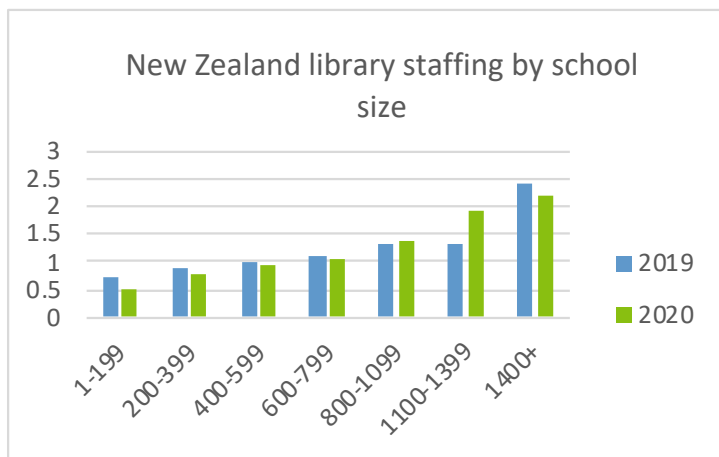
School Size	2019	2020
1 - 199	0.5	0.6
200 - 399	1.1	0.8
400 - 599	1.3	1.2
600 - 799	1.6	1.7
800 - 1099	2.3	2.2
1100 - 1399	3.2	2.8
1400+	4.4	4.3



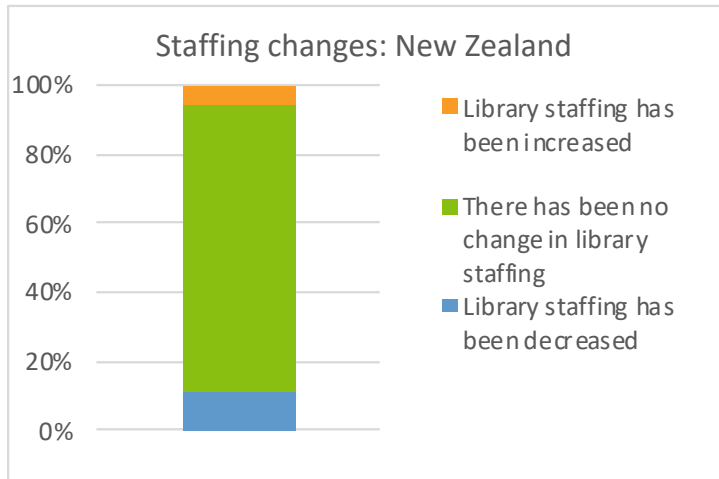
When asked about staffing changes, from 2019 - 2020, 7% of Australian respondents reported staffing increases, 25% reported staffing decreases, and 68% reported that there has been no change in library staffing.

When looking at results from the 2019 survey, 9% of Australian respondents reported staffing increases, 27% reported staffing decreases, and 64% reported that there has been no change in staffing from 2018 – 2019.

When looking at New Zealand school library staffing by school size, respondents from with less than 800 students, and 1400+ students have reported fewer full time equivalent staffing numbers in 2020 than in 2019. Respondents from schools with between 800 and 1399 students reported more full time equivalent staffing numbers.



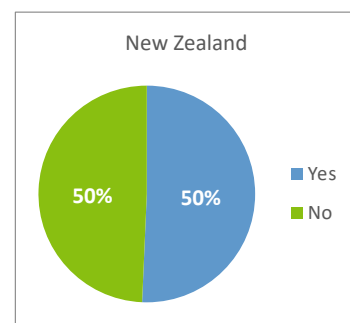
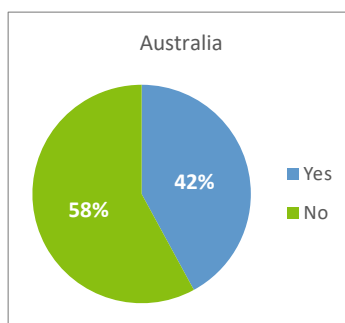
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400 - 599	1.0	0.9
600 - 799	1.1	1.0
800 - 1099	1.3	1.4
1100 - 1399	1.3	1.9
1400+	2.4	2.2



When asked about staffing changes, from 2019 - 2020, 6% of New Zealand respondents reported staffing increases, 11% reported staffing decreases, and 83% reported that there has been no change in library staffing. When looking at results from the 2019 survey, 8% of New Zealand respondents reported staffing increases, 12% reported staffing decreases, and 80% reported that there has been no change in staffing from 2018 – 2019.

Participants were also asked whether they thought that their school library was adequately resourced including budget and staffing. 42% of Australian respondents and 50% of New Zealand respondents said “yes”.

This has improved since 2019 when 38% of Australian respondents and 48% of New Zealand respondents reported that they thought their library was adequately funded.



Support and engagement

In 2020, a question was added to the survey that asked about the level of support for, and engagement with, the school library.

35% of Australian respondents reported a low – very low level of support from the Senior Leadership Team, 38% reported a moderate level of support, and 26% reported a high – very high level of support.

30% of Australian respondents reported a low – very low level of teacher engagement with the library, 47% reported a moderate level of engagement, and 23% reported a high – very high level of engagement.

10% of Australian respondents reported a low – very low level of student engagement with the library, 38% reported a moderate level of engagement, and 52% reported a high – very high level of engagement.

31% of New Zealand respondents reported a low – very low level of support from the Senior Leadership Team, 31% reported a moderate level of support, and 37% reported a high – very high level of support.

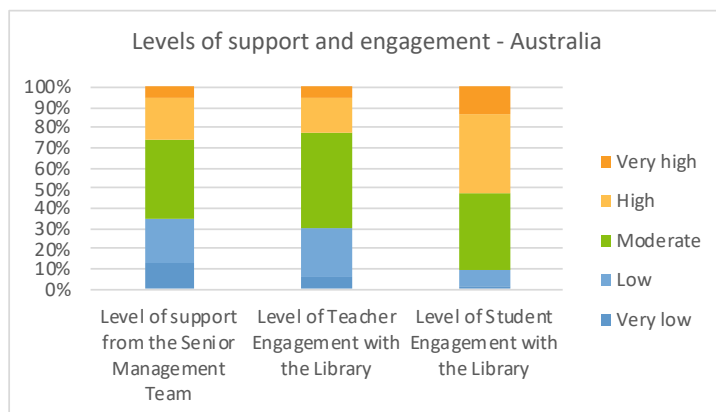
29% of New Zealand respondents reported a low – very low level of teacher engagement with the library, 47% reported a moderate level of engagement, and 25% reported a high – very high level of engagement.

15% of New Zealand respondents reported a low – very low level of student engagement with the library, 40% reported a moderate level of engagement, and 46% reported a high – very high level of engagement.

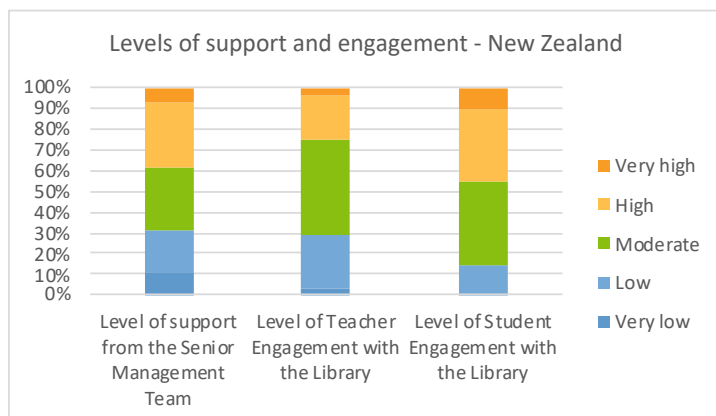
The voice of school library staff

While the survey looks at a range of statistical data, which helps to build a reference point for advocacy, an important function of the survey is the avenue it provides for school library staff to share opinions and ideas. As shared by one respondent to the 2019 survey,

I would like to thank Softlink for providing access to this survey and allowing library professionals to have a voice, as well as providing a valuable tool for advocacy. I very much look forward to reading the results of this survey next year.



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Every year, open-ended questions are posed at the end of the survey to help facilitate this. The answers are then collated and used to create feature documents based on common themes as they emerge.

To date Softlink has produced 13 feature documents around the themes of challenges school libraries face, opportunities, trending topics, innovative ideas, promoting the library, collaboration and more.

To access these feature documents read [Softlink's School Library Survey Feature Documents](#).

The 2020 School Library Survey Reports

[The full 2020 School Library Survey Reports for Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom were published at the end of April](#). Points for analysis include annual school library budgets and staffing levels, as well as the use of digital resources in school libraries, school library services, trends, and other key factors important to school libraries.

About Softlink

Established in 1983, Softlink Education is an Australian company with global influence, serving school library and education department customers in almost 70 countries.

Softlink Education works with school libraries and educators to provide solutions that engage students and support school library staff. Our mission is to equip both individual schools and districts with the most comprehensive and effective solutions to engage their students, improve literacy outcomes and promote student achievement.

Our flagship school library system, Oliver v5, is continually being developed to meet the changing needs of libraries, educators, and students. Our information curating tool, LearnPath, provides an easy to use platform to guide students, support the development of research skills and promote the value of school libraries and resources. LearnPath comes with access to over 300 Australian curriculum-based guides, populated with resources curated by qualified teacher librarians. OverDrive offers over 2.2 million eBooks, narrated eBooks, audiobooks, music, and videos available across a full range of subjects, from 5,000 publishers, and with over 50,000 Australian titles.

Softlink Education products offer deep digital integration with eBooks and streamlined integration with virtual learning environments and school administration systems.

We have had a long partnership with the library and information industry and understand the challenges and opportunities the 21st century presents for school libraries.

References

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2010) Media Release 18 March, Retrieved from: https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ee/schoollibraries/media/media01.pdf

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